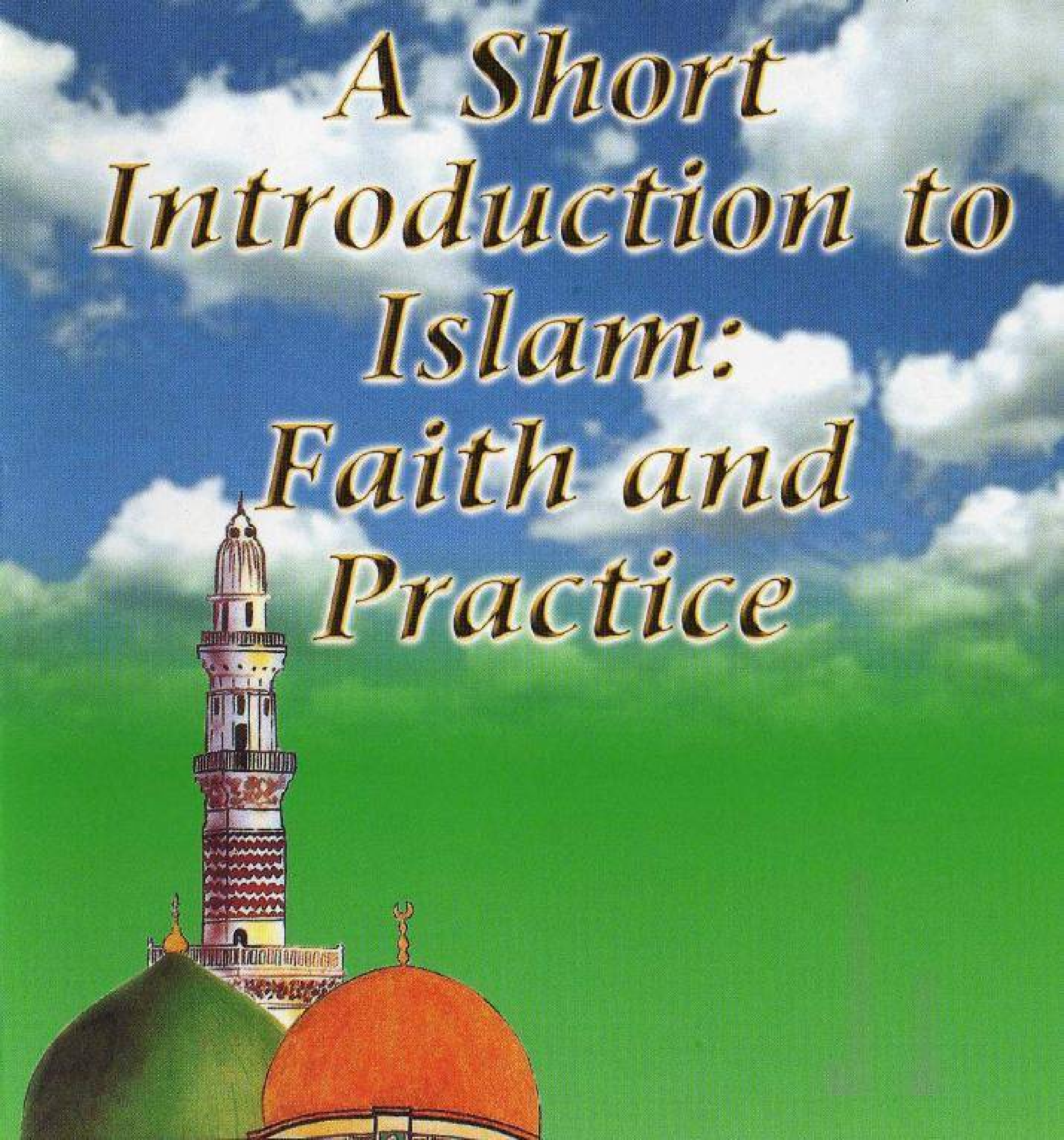

A Short Introduction to Islam: Faith and Practice

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Preface

IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE MERCIFUL,
THE COMPASSIONATE

Praise be to *Allah* and may peace and blessing be on His most beloved messenger Muhammad *(PBUH)*.

This booklet offers a short introduction to Islamic faith and practice. It is prepared for Non-Muslims who visit our Mosques and wish to know about Islam. These visitors are mostly school children and their teachers, but some scholars and clergy also visit our Mosques to learn something of Islam.

It is hoped that this booklet will provide some basic information to all of them and will also help teachers of Religious Education at schools and other general readers.

I am greatly indebted to all the members of MLC, particularly, to those who have helped in the preparation and publication of this booklet, and those members of the community who have sponsored it. May *Allah* bless all of them with a good reward. Amin.

24th April 2001



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A Short Introduction to Islam: Faith and Practice

Islamic Faith:

The Arabic word *"ISLAM"* means voluntary surrender to the will of *Allah* and obedience to His commandments. *"ALLAH"*, is an Arabic word and the proper name of God. Muslims prefer to use *Allah* rather than God. The Islamic way of life is based on total obedience to Allah. This is the way to obtain peace in this world and in the life hereafter, hence, Islam also means peace. A Muslim greets another Muslim by saying:

As-salamu-alekum - peace be upon you, and the reply is
Wa'alaikumus-salam - peace be on you too.

Islam is a complete way of life. A person who freely and consciously accepts that "there is no deity except *Allah* and Muhammad is the Messenger of *Allah*", is called a Muslim. This declaration in Arabic words is:

LA ILAHA ILLALLAH, MUHAMMADUR RASUL ULLAH

This declaration is made by every Muslim. A believing Muslim is one into whose heart this declaration has penetrated completely, as the other pillars of Islam and the articles of faith are derived from it. The articles of faith in Islam are belief in angels, *Allah's* books, Messengers, life hereafter and the day of Judgement.

According to Islamic faith, humanity receives from its Creator not only innate good nature, reason and conscience but also special guidance called revelation through His messenger. AL-QUR'AN is the sacred book of Muslims and the final book of guidance from *Allah* sent down to Muhammad (peace be upon him) through the angel Gabriel *(JIBRA'IL)*.

Muslims believe that *Allah* is the Creator, the Lord and the Master, the One, Who brings into existence things from nothing. He is only One Who deserves to be worshipped. There are five cardinal pillars of Islam: viz., the article of faith *(SHAHADA)* daily obligatory prayers *(SALAH)* welfare contribution *(ZAKAH)* fasting in the month of Ramadan *(SAWM)* and pilgrimage to the House of Allah *(HAJJ)*.

As Islam is a complete way of life. It tells man about the purpose of creation and existence, our ultimate destiny, and our place among other creatures. It teaches Muslims their rights and obligations to each other and to humanity at large.

Man is a part of human society and of the universe. The laws that govern the human nature, govern their mutual relationship. According to the Islamic concept, Allah has created the whole universe. The universe came into existence when Allah willed it. The whole universe is obedient to the will of Allah. The laws that govern human nature are no different from the laws governing the universe.

The laws that *Allah* has given to the believers to organise their lives, form the part of Islamic Code of life *(SHARIAH)*. Each word of *Allah*, whether it is an injunction or a prohibition, a promise or an admonition, a rule or guidance is a part of the *SHARIAH*, binding on Muslims.

Islam divides society into two parts: the one which follows Islam in belief and practice, in law and organisation, in morals and manners and the other which does not follow Islam. In Islam, "It is *Allah*, Who is sovereign in the heavens and sovereign in the earth" (Qur'an 43:84). Hence, "the command belongs to *Allah* alone" (Qur'an 12:40). Every person owes obedience to His Divine laws *(SHARIAH)*. It frees every person from servitude to others and thus freedom prevails. *SHARIAH*, forms the attitude of the Muslims, controls their way of life, their marriages and family lives, their diet, dress and festivals, sets out criteria for their social life and determines values of their habits and traditions.

Only Islam has the distinction of basing fundamental, binding relationships in its society on belief and on the basis of this belief, black and white, red and yellow, and Arabs and Greeks, become one community. In this society, *Allah* is the Lord and only He is worshipped. The most honourable among the people is one who is the noblest in character, and all individuals are equally subject to the laws of *(SHARIAH)* which are not man-made, but made by *Allah* the Creator of the universe.

Muslims believe that they have come from *Allah* and unto *Allah* is their ultimate return. If they lead their lives in accordance with guidance provided by the Divine, it will enable them to avoid hell-fire and attain the reward with a place in paradise in the life after death. Therefore, they pray to *Allah* for His help, guidance and bounty. Prayer is the heart of the Islamic religion and faith. Allah, the most Gracious, has taught the Muslims in the opening chapter of the Holy Qur'an (Surah Fatiha) a beautiful and comprehensive supplication, consisting of the following articles:

1. Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the universe,

2. The Beneficent, the Merciful,

3. The Owner of the Day of Judgement,

4. Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help,

5. Show us the straight path,

6. The path of those whom Thou hast favoured,

7. Not the path of those who earn Thy anger nor of those who go astray. Amin!

The Muslim Scripture

Al-Qur'an is the sacred book of Muslims and the final book of guidance from *Allah*, sent down to Muhammad *(PBUH)* through the angel Gabriel.

On the night of 27th of the month of Ramadan Muhammad *(PBUH)*, the prophet of Islam, was in the cave of Hira, on the outskirts of the city of Makkah. He used to retire to this cave for peace, quiet and contemplation. He was concerned about the problems of his people, their drunkenness, adulteries, idolatry, wars, their rank injustices and cruelties.

The Prophet Muhammad was yearning for a solution. He often used to retire to this retreat. One night - the Night of Power and Excellence *(LAILALTUL-QADR)* when Divine peace rests on creation and all nature is lifted up towards its Lord. In the middle of that night, the book of God was opened to his thirsting soul. Gabriel, the angel of God, appeared to him and commanded him in Arabic, *"IQRA"*, which means read or recite or rehearse or proclaim. Muhammad *(PBUH)* was too terrified and was totally unprepared for this shock. In fear and trepidation he cried out, maa-ana-beqaa-ri", I am not learned. The angel repeated the command *"IQRA"*, for the second time, with identical response from Muhammad *(PBUH)* Gabriel embraced him hard and commanded him the third time, *"IQRA BISMI RABB-I-KALLAZI KHALAQ"*, "read in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created". Muhammad *(PBUH)* now grasped that what he was required to do, was repeating what was being said. Following the above first verse, four more verses were repeated and recited by Muhammad *(PBUH)*.

Every word of the Qur'an is the word of Allah. It was revealed over a period of 23 years in Arabic language. It contains 114 chapters *(SURAHS)*, 6,236 verses and 323,760 words. Muslims learn to read it in Arabic and many memorise it completely.

The holy Qur'an in its own words is "a fountain of mercy and wisdom, a warning to the heedless, a guide to the erring, an assurance to those in doubt, a solace to the suffering, a hope to those in despair". (Al-Qur'an 90:1-2)

The holy Qur'an is unrivalled in its recording and preservation. The astonishing fact about this book of *Allah* is that it has remained completely unchanged for over fourteen centuries.

The holy Qur'an deals with man and his ultimate goal in life. Its teachings cover all aspects of this life and life after death. It contains principles, doctrines and directions for every sphere of human activities. One of the unique features of the holy Qur'an is its call to reflect on the signs in the heavens and earth and in the soul of man itself. It invites reflection on the signs of His presence and purpose in creation. It also includes the stories of the previous prophets viz. Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Lot, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Jesus. Muhammad was the final messenger of *Allah* to mankind.

The theme of the holy Qur'an broadly consists of three fundamental concepts: the oneness of *Allah* (God); Prophethood and life after death.

The holy Qur'an warns human beings not to play into the hands of the devil (Satan) who is man's arch enemy and reminds us of the day of judgment, when *Allah* will be sitting on His throne and we will be presented to account for our deeds. It teaches man to fear *Allah* and adore Him by His beautiful names and perform prayers for uplift of oneself spiritually and to be hopeful for the mercy of your Lord.

Listed below are the first five verses of the first revelation to Muhammad *(PBUH)* for the readers' reflection and study:

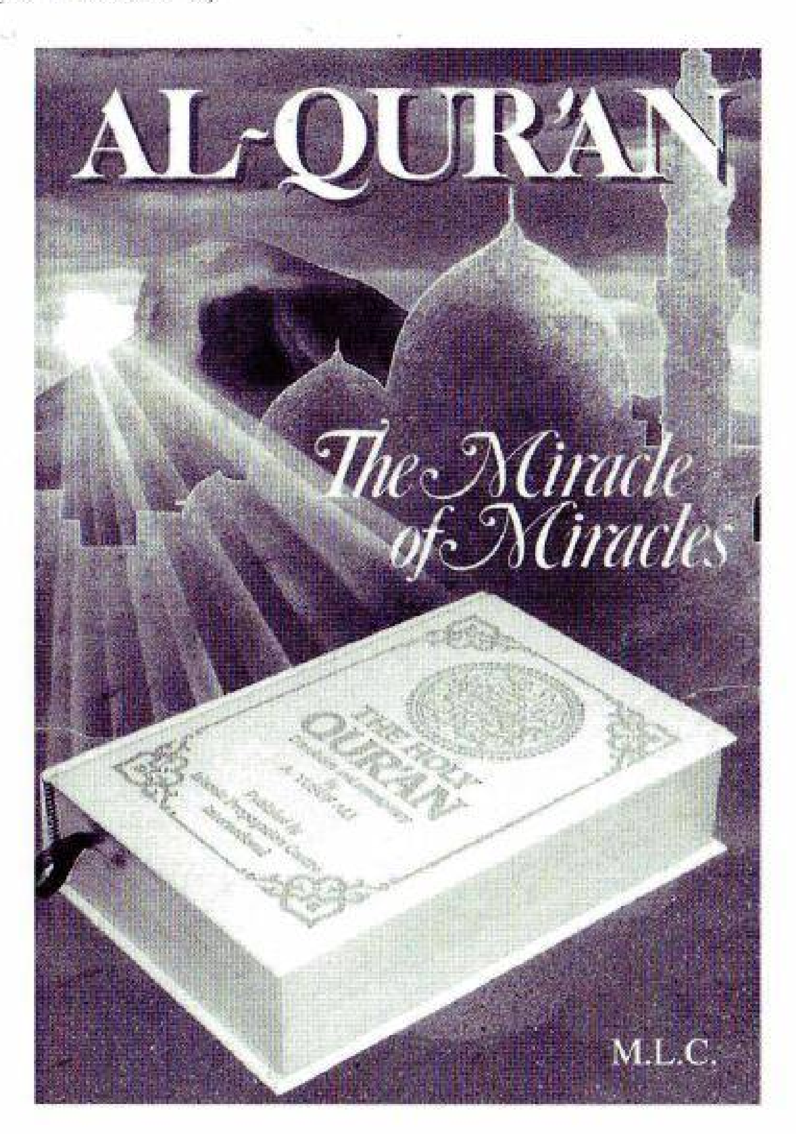
1. Read! (or proclaim) in the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, Who created;

2. Created man, out of a clot of congealed blood,

3. Proclaim! and thy Lord is the most Bountiful,

4. He, Who taught (the use of) the pen,

5. Taught man which he knew not.
(Al-Qur'an 96:1-5)



Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and the Sunnah.

The Qur'an is the divine revelation and primary source of guidance. Sunnah is the tradition of the Holy Prophet Muhammad *(PBUH)*. The Qur'an says, "Take what the apostle assigns to you and abandon that which he withholds from you". (Qur'an 4:80).

As long the Prophet Muhammad *(PBUH)* lived, he was naturally regarded as a teacher and an ideal person to settle problems arising out of daily life. All sorts of legal problems, particularly those which arose out of the terms of the holy Qur'an referred to him. Thus, he was elevated to the position of judge supreme, with the function of interpreting and explaining the general provisions of the divine revelation. In addition, he not only interpreted the verses of the holy Qur'an but also he practically implemented them first in his own life and then enforced them in the Muslim society that existed at that time. All his example and teaching is a valuable treasure; the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and is binding on Muslims.

Prophet Muhammad *(PBUH)*, son of Abdullah, grandson of Abdul Muttalib of the tribe of Qureysh of Arabia, was born in Makkah on April 20, 571 AD. His father had died before he was born and he was brought up first by his grandfather Abdul Muttalib and after his death by uncle Abu Talib. Aminah, the mother of the Prophet Muhammad *(PBUH)* died when the Prophet was only six. His first marriage took place at the age of 25 with a noble lady of Makkah, Khadijah, who was 15 years older than he was. This marriage proved a very happy one and lasted for almost 26 years, as long as she lived.

The Prophet Muhammad *(PBUH)* began to receive revelation from *Allah* at the age of 40. The people of Makkah at that time worshipped idols. The Prophet Muhammad *(PBUH)* invited them to Islam and declared that there is no deity other than *Allah*, Who alone should alone be worshipped. For the first three years, he preached only to his family members and intimate friends.

He was then commanded to "rise up and warn". Whereupon he began to preach in public, pointing out the wretched folly of idolatry in the face of the tremendous laws of day and night, of life and death, of growth and decay, which manifest the power of *Allah* and attest His sovereignty. The leaders of the Makkan people became actively hostile, persecuting his poor disciples, mocking and insulting them. Having no success with Makkans, he went to Ta'if, but with no success. He advised his followers to leave Makkah to avoid persecution, but the Makkan hatched a plan to kill him. The Prophet awaited God's command. It came at last. It was the night chosen by his enemies for his assassination. He left the home accompanying Abu Bakr (RA) and set out on a long journey to Yathrib, now known as Madinah. The Islamic calendar begins from the day of migration of the Prophet Muhammad *(PBUH)*.

The people of Madinah accepted him as their leader and he established the first Islamic state there. The Prophet organised the early Muslims and preached the message of *Allah* with unmatched patience and wisdom. The Qureysh of Makkah armed themselves against him and the first battle was fought at Badr. The Muslims won this battle with the assistance of Allah, despite the fact that their opponents were a well equipped and three times greater in number. Subsequent to this war there were the battle of Uhud; the war of the Trench; the campaign of Khyber, until the truce of Hudeybia was broken by his enemies. It was at the time that the Prophet Muhammad *(PBUH)* summoned all the Muslims capable of bearing arms and marched with them towards Makkah. The Qureysh were overpowered and they laid down their weapons. Makkah was conquered without bloodshed. The Prophet proclaimed a general amnesty and forgave all of them. It was beyond the expectation of the Makkans. In their relief and surprise, the whole population of Makkah hastened to swear allegiance to the Prophet Muhammad *(PBUH)*.

The Prophet caused all the idols which were in the sanctuary to be destroyed, saying, "Truth has come; darkness hath vanished". Eventually Islam was established in the whole of the Arabian Peninsula and made a tremendous contribution to the history and civilisation of the world. Within a very short span of time, the Message of Islam spread from Arabia to most parts of the known world. Over a billion Muslims today still bear testimony to the success of that message. The personality of the Prophet Muhammad *(PBUH)* was good enough to stand up to all the tests of his time and he left behind him such a legacy, which has changed the history of this world. *"Muhammad is the most successful of all the prophets and religious personalities"*. (Encyclopaedia Britannica)

Michael H. Hart, an American Christian, astronomer, mathematician, lawyer, chessmaster, and scientist after extensive research published an incisive biography of the 100 most influential people of all times. From this research, which included such illustrious personalities, as Jesus Christ, Moses, Caesar, the Wright brothers, Napoleon, Shakespeare, Columbus and Michael Angelo, Michael Hart rated the Prophet Muhammad as number one. He concluded the biography with the words; "It is this unparalleled combination of secular and religious influence which I feel entitles Muhammad *(PBUH)* to be considered the most influential single figure in human history."

In an era when the world was awash in rivers of blind prejudices and nonsensical ignorance, the Prophet Muhammad's *(PBUH)*, divine message and glorious teachings became the purging torrents of spiritual enlightenment.

May *Allah* exalt the Prophet Muhammad *(PBUH)*, his family, his companions and all the believers. *Inshallah!* Amin.

The role of the Mosque in the Muslim community.

Places of worship are known from the begining of recorded history. This is a confirmation of the fact that man is craving to establish a relationship with his Creator. He built the temples, the shrines, the synagogue the churches and the Mosques for this purpose. These places fulfilled in one way or other this basic task, in accordance with the vision of the role of religion in the life of the given religious tradition.

The Mosque is the most important institution in Islam. After the home and working place, it is the most frequented place. Muslims visit it five times daily. There, they rekindle their spirituality, strengthen their relationship with their Creator, meet their fellow Muslims and renew their sense of belonging.

Looking at the early stage of the Islamic Mission, in particular, the Makkan era, a small group of converts living in a sea of polytheists were living as strangers in such an environment. The non-Muslims dominated all the authorities, the way of life as social norms. This may account for the absence of a Mosque built by the Muslims. However, there was the KA'BA, the cubical building, which was first built by the Prophet Abraham in Makkah, it remained a place of pilgrimage right up to the advent of Islam, when it became the centre of worship and pilgrimage for the Muslim community who carried on the monotheistic message of the Abrahamic faith. The Ka'ba is situated in the great Mosque in Makkah, known as Masjid-al-Haram (the sacred Mosque).

The migration of the Prophet Muhammad *(PBUH)* from Makkah to Madinah signalled a great change in the character of the Muslim community. For the first time, the Prophet felt free from the dominant authority of the polytheists of Makka. On his arrival on the outskirts of Madinah, at Quba, he built the first Mosque. After staying at Quba for five days, he went into al-Madinah. At the time of arriving in Madinah, he had been riding a she-camel. He released the reigns of his she-camel

so that she would find a spontaneous place to halt, to which nobody could object. The Prophet descended at the place where she stopped and later built a great Mosque there. It is called the Prophet's Mosque. This was a great indication of the far-reaching role the Mosque had to play in moulding the shape of the community, which was chosen by *Allah*, to lead humanity in the spiritual, moral and social changes, which was going to change the future history of mankind until the last day.

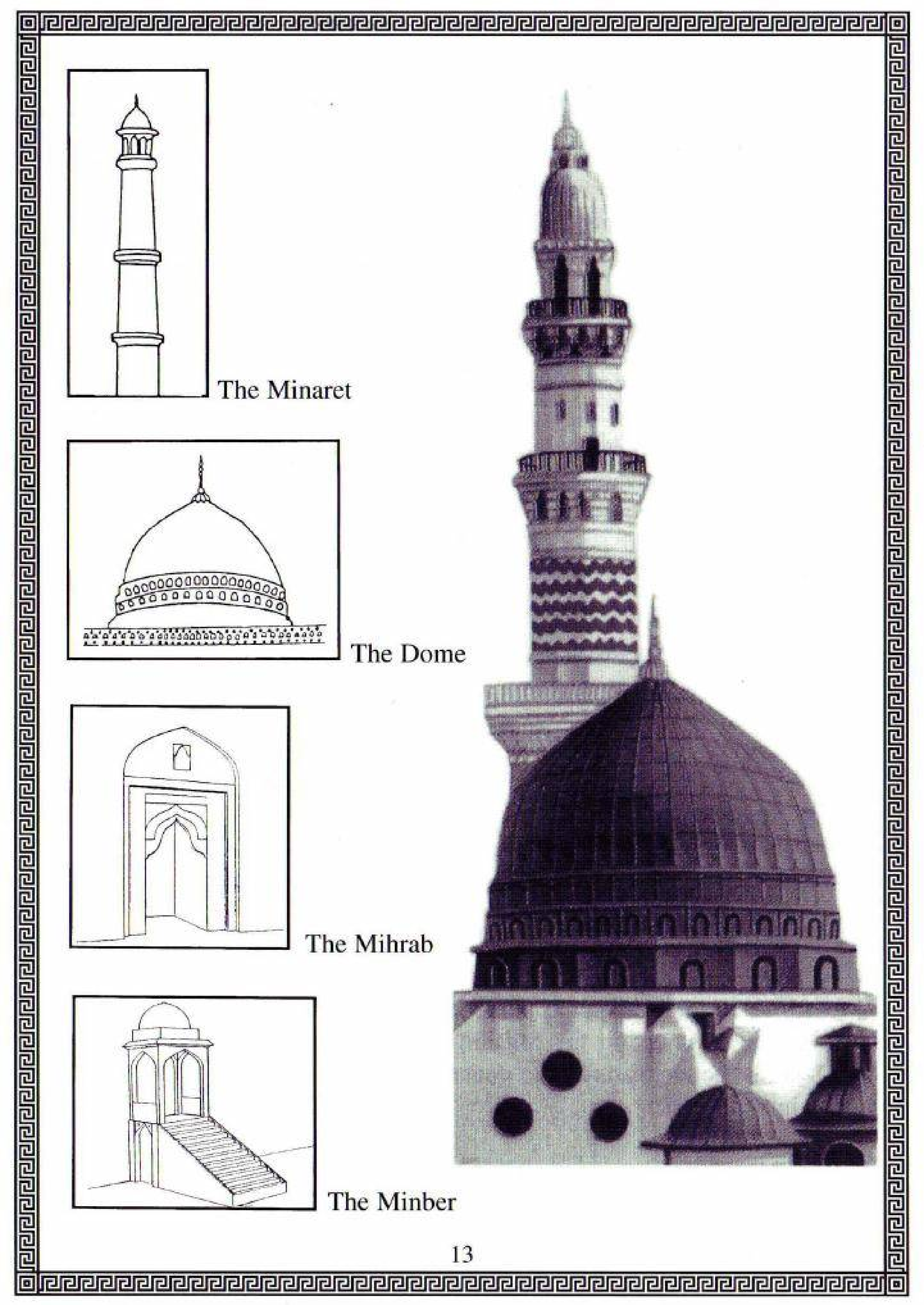
At Madinah, the Prophet was free to meet his companions at any time and place. The most suitable venue was the Mosque. From its inauguration, the Mosque was given an importance that was not given before to any place of worship. The life of the newly emerging community was gradually taking shape in and through the Mosque.

Beside the prayers, these were the most important functions of the Mosque of the Prophet:

i. Centre of learning ;
ii. A place to receive dignitaries and delegates;
iii. A charity distribution centre;
iv. A shelter for homeless people;
v. A place of entertainment on special occasions;
vi. A judicial court.

The functions of the Mosque in Muslim countries nowadays are somehow limited in view of the fact that many institutions have been established besides the Mosque. They perform the functions that have been transferred from the Mosque.

Mosques in general are places of worship. Though Muslims are permitted to offer their prayers anywhere on the earth, provided that place is clean, yet for the purpose of a congregation, a Mosque is essential. Mosques in the Muslim world are built for this purpose. Their distinctive features are: minarets, a dome, a mehrab (niche) and a mimber (pulpit).


The Minaret
The Dome
The Mihrab
The Minber

Today the world population of Muslims is more than 1.2 billion. The following is the population of some of the Muslim counties based on the Muslim directory UK 2000.

Country	Population (Million)	Country	Population (Million)
Afghanistan	20	Saudi Arabia	17.5
Kyrgyz tan	4.7	Iran	67.4
Algeria	27.9	Sudan	28
Libya	5.4	Iraq	20.4
Azerbaijan	8	Syria	14.7
Malaysia	20	Ivory Cost	14.3
Bangladesh	120.5	Tajikistan	6
Morocco	27	Jordan	5.4
Egypt	62.8	Tanzania	17
Nigeria	111.5	Kashmir(Azad&Held)	13
Guinea	6.8	Tunisia	8.9
Pakistan	140	Kazakhstan	17.1
Indonesia	197	Turkey	62
		Uzbekistan	22.8

Muslim in non-Muslim Countries:

Country	Total Population (Million)	Population %
China	1200	7
Eritrea	3.5	45
Mozambique	16.5	16
Ghana	17.5	38
India	936	11

Muslim in non-Muslim Countries:

Country	Total Population (Million)	Population %
Albania	3.4	75
Bulgaria	8.8	13
France	58	2
Germany	81.5	2
UK	58.3	2
Yugoslavia	4.5	19
Argentina	250	2
Canada	29.3	1
Guyana	1.3	10
USA	263.5	.25
Australia	17	1
New Zealand	3	.4

Islam then, is the only divine way of life, which brings out the noblest human characteristics, developing and using them for the construction of human society. Islam has remained unique in this respect to this day. Those who deviate from this system, whether it is based on nationalism, colour and race, class struggle or similar theories, are truly enemies of mankind. They do not want man to develop those noble characteristics, which have been given to him by his Creator, nor do they wish to see a human society benefited from the harmonious blending of all those capabilities, experiences and characteristics, which have been developed among the various races of mankind.

Islam is a vital force. It is still taught and observed by a worldwide community. Islam has survived revolution in Turkey and the communist world, and Islam has shown that it has much to contribute in lending a moral and spiritual dynamic to the social reforms and revolutions in many parts of the Muslim world. In fact, it is the only system, which can restore peace and human dignity.

The message of Islam is ——— Join in!

To help us achieve this aim, a set of formal *"IBADAH"* has been drawn up as a course of training. The more assiduously we follow the training, the better equipped we are to harmonise the ideals and practices. The *"IBADAH"* are thus the pillars on which the edifice of Islam rests. These are commonly known as the five pillars of Islam, which are:

1. *"SHAHADA"* proclamation of one's belief as a Muslim;
2. *"SALAH"* five daily prayers;
3. *"ZAKAH"* welfare contribution;
4. *"SAWM"* fasting of the month of Ramadan; and
5. *"HAJJ"* pilgrimage to the House of Allah, once in a lifetime

If these five duties are performed regularly, correctly and sincerely, then it will transform a Muslim's life, in accordance with the wishes of the Creator. Faithful practice of these duties should inspire us to work towards the establishment of justice, equality and righteousness. Therefore, one needs a little more detail of these duties.

SALAH (Worship)

Many people including some Muslims misunderstand the concept of worship. Worship is commonly taken to mean performing ritualistic acts such as prayers, fasting, charity, etc. This limited understanding of worship is only one part of the comprehensive concept of worship in Islam. That is why traditional definition of worship includes almost everything in any individual's activities.

Ritual worship, if performed in a true spirit, elevate man morally and spiritually. It enables him to carry on his activities in all the walks of life according to the guidance provided by Almighty *Allah*. Among ritual worship, *Salah*, formal prayer, occupies the key position. Salah constitutes one pillar of Islam and is considered the cornerstone of the religion.

Salah refers to the five obligatory daily prayers, which are offered individually or in congregation. *Salah* is an act of worship, which we as Muslims should offer to remember Allah. It brings us closer to Him. The Qur'an says: ***"Establish Salah to remember me (Allah)".*** (20:14)

Salah is a distinctive mark of a believer. It prevents an individual from all sorts of abominations and vices by providing him chances of direct communion with his Creator five times a day. He renews his covenant with *Allah* and seeks His guidance again and again by saying: "You alone we worship and to ***You alone we turn for help. Guide us along the straight path".*** (1:5-6)

Salah strengthens the belief in the existence of God and transmits this belief into the innermost recesses of the man's heart. It enlivens this belief and makes it constructive in the practical course of life and helps man to realise his natural and instinctive aspirations to greatness and high morality. Furthermore, it purifies the heart and develops the mind, cultivates the conscience and comforts the soul. It fosters the good and decent elements in man, and suppresses the evil and indecent inclinations. *Salah* is the first manifestation of Faith and also the foremost of the basic conditions for the success of the believers. ***"Successful indeed are the believers who are humble in their prayers".*** (23:1-2)

Any Muslim who fails to observe the Prayers without reasonable excuse is committing a grave offence and a heinous sin. This sin is grave because it is not only against *Allah*, but is also against the very nature of man. The best way to cultivate in man a sound personality and actualise his aspirations in a mature course of development is Islamic Prayer. To neglect Salah is to oppress the good qualities in human nature.

Salah is the practical proof of our faith in *Allah* and Islam. *Allah* says in the holy Qur'an:

"Salah at fixed times has been enjoined on the believers." (4:103)

The daily prayers are:

1. *FAJR* (From dawn until just before sunrise)
2. *ZUHR* (After mid-day until afternoon)
3. *ASR* (From late afternoon until sunset)
4. *MAGHRIB* (After sunset till the daylight ends)
5. *ISHA* (From night until dawn breaks)

We offer *Salah* to remember *Allah* our Creator and to be close to Him, to gain His favour and bounty. The offering of *Salah* is obligatory upon every Muslim, male or female, who is:

- sane and responsible;
- relatively mature and after the age of puberty; normally about fourteen. (Children should be trained by their parents to start practising *Salah* at the age of seven and strongly urged by the age of ten).

The following is a beautiful supplication offered in the night prayers, *Qunut:*

"O God! We beseech You for help and guidance, and seek Your protection and believe in You, rely on You, and extol You and are thankful to You and are not ungreatful to You, and we declare ourselves clear of and forsake him, who disobeys You.

O God! To You we pray and prostrate ourselves, and to You we betake ourselves, and in obeying You we are quick and Your mercy do we hope for and Your punishment do we fear, for Your punishment overtakes the unbelievers.

O God! Exalt our Master Muhammad and his people, and the true followers".

The Call for Prayer (Adhan)

Before the prayers, the *Muadhdhin* calls people to prayer, this is called the *Adhan.* It is a call to leave every thing behind and come to Almighty *Allah* for the prayer. The wording of the *Ad'han* is:

- ***Allah is the great; Allah is the great.***
- ***Allah is the great; Allah is the great.***
- ***I bear witness that there is no deity other than Allah.***
- ***I bear witness that there is no deity other than Allah.***
- ***I bear witness that Muhammad (PBUH) is the Messenger of Allah.***
- ***I bear witness that Muhammad (PBUH) is the Messenger of Allah.***
- ***Come for the prayer; Come for the prayer.***
- ***Come for the salvation; Come for the salvation.***
- ***Allah is the great; Allah is the great.***
- ***There is no one to be worshipped, but Allah.***

Fasting in the month of Ramadan

Fasting as an institution, discipline and experience, in one form or another, has always been an important and often necessary part of religious life, in almost every faith. The Qur'an says:

"O you believers! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may (learn) self-restraint (taqwa). (Al-Qur'an 2:183)

Fasting is considered as a practical way of thanksgiving for the guidance provided. Millions of Muslims throughout the world fast every year in the month of Ramadan. Muslims have been fasting every year since the second year of *Hijrah,* when the verses concerning fasting were revealed to the Prophet. One finds absolute continuity and universality in the observance of this act of worship by Muslims the world over.

Fasting means to abstain from eating, drinking, smoking and sexual intercourse from dawn to dusk for the sake of *Allah.* The true spirit of fasting is to refrain from all kinds of sin. In Islam, fasting is not regarded as an act of penance or atonement or a means of torturing the body but as a discipline. Through fasting, the believer learns how to control the three basic desires: hunger, thirst and sex. These are not only desires but also the necessities of a man. Islam does not want to crush them; it rather controls them and brings them within control and limitation. When a believer develops self-control over his legitimate desires, it becomes easier to control his evil desires because of will power, which he had developed by fasting. While fasting, one must cultivate the habit of abstaining from all forbidden acts and if he does not fast with a true spirit; fasting becomes fruitless. As the Prophet Muhammad *(PBUH)* said: ***"Whoever does not give up false speech and evil conduct, Allah is not in need of his abstaining from food and drink."*** (Sahih-al-Bukhari)

The Prophet has called fasting a "Shield". Fasting is a shield in various senses if it is observed with its true spirit. Fasting may protect the observer against hellfire, against the attacks of Satan, our own bad desires and other evil forces. The Prophet has advised the fasting person not to use obscene language or do any act of ignorance. If any other person uses bad language against him or tries to quarrel with him, he should try his best to avert it and avoid it by saying; "I am fasting". This kind of attitude will safeguard him against indulging in any wrong action.

There is a difference between fasting and starving. In starving only the stomach fasts but in real Islamic fasting every part of the body observes the fast. As the Prophet *(PBUH)* said: ***"When you fast, let your ear fast and your eye fast and your tongue fast and your hand and every limb fast".***

Such a view of "Total Fast" is in the interest of the purification of both the body and soul through regular suspension of interaction with the world so that one is protected from corrupting contact with the world. Such was the revelation to Mary (RA) when she had given birth to Jesus *(PBUH):*

"So eat and drink and cool your eye and if you see any man say: I have vowed fast to the Gracious One and this day will enter into no talk with any human being". (Al-Qur'an 19:26)

In Islamic practice, fasting from speech is sometimes associated with retreating from the world during the month of fasting or at other times. Fasting is a discipline of self-control, purification of body, mind and soul and illuminating hearts. All lead to concentration in prayer and worship in humility and source of presence before One God.

ZAKAH (Spending in the way of the Good)

There is voluntary spending for good causes and in Islam, there is obligatory spending which is called *Zakah,* a set percentage of one's annual extra wealth to be given in the way of God. The following verses of the Qur'an will express the entire perspective on *Zakah* more eloquently than formal academic account. The Qur'an places *Zakah* (charity) in the broadest perspective, as an integral part of one's spiritual being and conduct. The key verse is at the very beginning of the holy Qur'an (Chapter 2:1-2):

"This is the Book in it is guidance sure, without doubt, to those who fear God; who believe in the Unseen, are steadfast in prayer and spend out what we have provided for them".

"Those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah and do not follow up their gifts with reminders of their generosity or with injury their reward is with their Lord ... (2:262)

"The likeness of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah, is as the likeness of a grain (of corn): it grows seven ears and each ear has a hundred grains. Allah gives manifold to His credit (in repaying) and he will have (besides) a good reward (i.e. paradise)". (57:11)

"Alms are for the poor and the needy, and those employed to administer (the funds), for those whose hearts have been (recently) reconciled (to truth); for those in bondage and in debt; in the cause of God; and wayfarer: (this is it) ordained by God and God is full of knowledge and wisdom". (9:60)

The verse which highlights in all essential details the unity of faith and conduct is the following; inviting one and all to ponder and understand the totality of one's conduct who believes in, and is at peace with God:

"It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East and West; but it is righteousness to believe in God, and the Last Day, and

the Angels and the Books and the Messengers; to spend of your sustenance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer for those who ask and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer and practice regular charity; to fulfil the contracts which you have made and to be firm and patient in pain (or suffering) and adversity and throughout all periods of distress. Such are the people of truth, the God fearing". (2:177)

Zakah is a compulsory payment from a Muslim's annual savings at the rat of 2.5% on the value of cash, jewellery, and precious stones and metals. A separate rate applies to animals, crops and mineral wealth.

Zakah is neither a charity nor a tax. Charity is optional, whilst taxes can be levied by the government for any of the needs of the society.

Zakah, however, can only be spent on helping the poor a needy, the disabled, the oppressed, debtors and welfare purposes, as defined in the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

HAJJ (The pilgrimage of the House of *Allah*)

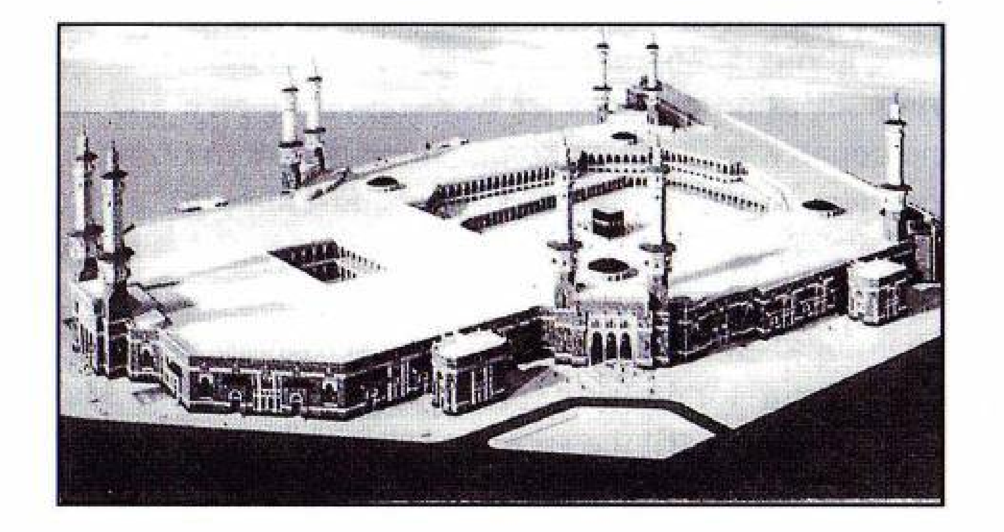
Muslims from different parts of the world gather once a year in Makkah for the most ritualistic act of *Hajj*. *Hajj* is a name of the collection of all the possible prayers in Islam. It contains every aspect of teachings of Islam. It has a very broad connotation though it consists of some set patterns and rules and rites, which the performer of *Hajj* (Pilgrim/Haji) has to perform.

It is a journey to the House of *Allah* in Makkah, Saudi Arabia, in the month of "Dhul-*Hajjah*", the twelfth month of the Islamic Calendar. *Hajj* symbolises the unity of mankind; Muslims from every race and nationality assemble, together in equality and humility to worship their Lord. The pilgrims, in ritual clothing of *"IHRAM"* have the unique feelings of being in the presence of their Creator, to Whom they belong. To Whom they must return after death, in the similar cloth of *"KAFAN"* i.e. two white sheets in which a dead person is wrapped before buryial. Nowadays, every year about two to three millions Muslims gather in Makkah for the *Hajj* from all over the world.

The Ka'ba (the House of *Allah*) is the focal point of this spiritual *IBADAH*, which is also a symbol from antiquity for monotheistic worship, for giving testimony that one is present before the Supreme One having set aside every other association of race and language, nation and country, away from home, alone before the Alone, "Here I am O God, here I am." *(labbaika-Allahumma-Labbaik).*

According to the holy Qur'an the Ka'ba was built by Abraham and Ishmael, who were ordained by God to "sanctify my house for those who compass it around, or use it as a retreat, or bow or prostrate themselves therein for prayers". (2:135) After entering Makkah in peaceful triumph (628 CE) the apostle cleansed the House of God from all sorts of idols based upon superstitious beliefs and reconstructed the Ka'ba as the House of the one invisible transcendental God. The Ka'ba has therefore, remained central to Muslim piety being a direction of daily prayers and the place of sanctuary of peace where no blood is shed whether of any animal or any human, as a sign of harmony between man and man, between man and nature. The *Hajj* is based on the conviction of each pilgrim that, "Our God and your God is One God".

The pilgrimage to the Ka'ba is one of the pillars of Islamic faith and practice. Each adult Muslim, man and woman, is called upon to go on this pilgrimage, provided he or she has sufficient resources to travel to Makkah. The pilgrim (Haji) returns home as though transformed and refined as an example and teacher of the universal faith and identity of Islam. The *Hajj* therefore, relives Abrahamic faith and devotion, worship and his sacrifice every year. Thus making Islam the very ancient and the very recent call to faith in one Supreme God *(Allah)*.



A SUMMARY OF THE PROPHET'S LAST SERMON

This sermon was delivered on the ninth day of Dhul Hijja, 10A.H. in the valley of Arafat, during the performance of *Hajj*. This sermon delivered by the last Messenger of *Allah*, is the greatest charter for humanity. It is the only guarantee for peace, justice and equality.

Muhammad *(PBUH)* the highly praised; the chosen one; the trustworthy; the truthful; while delivering this farewell sermon, said:

"O people, lend me an attentive ear; for I know not whether after this year, I shall ever be amongst you again. Therefore, listen to what I am saying to you very carefully and TAKE THESE WORDS TO THOSE WHO COULD NOT BE PRESENT HERE TODAY.

O People, just as you regard this month, this day, this city as sacred, so regard the life and property of every Muslim as a sacred trust. Return the goods entrusted to you to their rightful owners. Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you. Remember that you will indeed meet your Lord, and that He will indeed reckon your deeds. Allah has forbidden you to take usury (interest), therefore, all interest obligation shall henceforth be waived. Your capital, however, is yours to keep. You will neither inflict nor suffer inequity. Allah has judged that there shall be no interest and that all the interest due to Abbas ibn'Abd'al Muttalib shall henceforth be waived...

Beware of Satan, for the safety of your religion. He has lost all hope that he will ever be able to lead you astray in big things, so beware of following him in small things.

O People, it is true that you have certain rights with regard to your women, but they also have rights over you. Remember that you have taken them as your wives only under Allah's trust and with His permission. If they abide by your right then to them belongs the right to be fed and clothed in kindness. Do treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers. However, it is your right that they do not make friends with anyone of whom you do not approve, as well as never to be unchaste.

O People, listen to me in earnest, worship Allah, say your five daily prayers (Salah), fast during the month of Ramadan, and give your wealth in Zakah. Perform Hajj if you can afford to.

All mankind is from Adam and Eve. An Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has superiority over an Arab; also, a white has no superiority over a black nor a black has any superiority over a white, except by piety and good deeds. Learn that every Muslim is a brother to every Muslim and that the Muslims constitute one brotherhood. Nothing shall be legitimate to a Muslim, which belongs to a fellow Muslim, unless it was given freely and willingly. Do not, therefore, do injustice to yourselves.

Remember, one day you will appear before Allah and answer for your deeds. So beware, do not stray from the path of righteousness after I am gone.

O People, NO PROPHET OR APOSTLE WILL COME AFTER ME AND NO NEW FAITH WILL BE BORN. Reason well, therefore, O People, and understand words, which I convey to you. I leave behind me two things, the Qur'an and Sunnah, and if you follow these you will never go astray.

ALL THOSE WHO LISTEN TO ME SHALL PASS ON MY WORDS TO OTHERS AND THOSE TO OTHERS AGAIN; and may those last one understand my words better than those who listen to me directly. Be my witness, O Allah, that I have conveyed your message to your people".

FESTIVALS

These celebrations are observed to seek the pleasure of *Allah*. There is no concept of a festival for pleasure's own sake in Islam; but there are occasions of joy and happiness. The happiest occasion in a Muslim's life is to see the laws of Allah established in their totality on the earth. *Eid-ul-Fitr* and *Eid-ul-Adha* are the two major festivals in Islam.

EID-UL-FITR is observed on the first day after the month of Ramadan. On this day, after a month of fasting, Muslims express their joy and happiness by offering a congregational prayer, preferably in an open field. They express their gratitude to *Allah* for enabling them to observe the fast. Special food is prepared and it is customary to visit friends and relatives and to give presents to children to make the occasion lively and special for them.

EID-UL-ADHA begins on the 10th day of the month of Dhul-Hijjah and continues until the 12th. This celebration is observed to commemorate the willingness of Abraham when he was asked to sacrifice his own son, Ishmael. Abraham showed his readiness and *Allah* was very pleased. A lamb was scarified instead of Ishmael on *Allah's* command. Muslims offer congregational prayer on the day and afterwards they sacrifice animals such as sheep, goats, cows and camels to seek the pleasure of *Allah*. The meat of the sacrificed animal is shared amongst relatives, neighbours and the poor.

Some other occasions to remember include the beginning of the Hijrah (migration of the Prophet), Lailatul *Mi'raj* (Night of Ascension) and dates of Islamic battles fought by Muhammad *(PBUH)*. There is a night of special significance in Ramadan known as Lailatul Qadr (Night of Power). It occurs in one of the odd numbered nights of the last ten days of the month of Ramadan. The Qur'an mentions it as a night "better than a thousand months".

Islamic festivals are observed according to the Islamic Calendar, which is based on lunar months. The lunar year is about 10 days shorter than the solar year. Festival dates are determined by the appearance of the moon.

CONCLUSION:

Allah, the most High, the Lord of the universe, has stated in His last revealed book, Al-Qur'an, "For, We assuredly sent among every people an apostle (with the command) to serve *Allah* and eschew evil". Hence it is the duty of each Muslim, to be well informed, about Islam, and to worship *Allah*, as ordained by the Islamic *SHARIAH*.

Allah has taught a beautiful supplication to his last apostle Muhammad *(PBUH)* commanding him to:

"Say; Truly my prayers and my services of sacrifice, my life and death, are all for *(Allah)*, the Cherisher of the universe: No partner hath He; thus am I commanded, and I am first of those who bow to His will. (Al-Qur'an 6:162-163)

The message of Islam is for all mankind. It is a universal religion. Its call transcends the barriers of race, colour and tongue. It raises the man, high enough near to the Creator and binds mankind in ever lasting community.

Let us all take a little time to reflect over this Divine message. May *Allah*, show us the Divine light and straight path. Amin!